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CANDID VINDICATION OF THE SECESSION CHURCH,

RESPECTING

Her Principles concerning the essential Properties of Christ's Kingdom;—Her Avowal of these Principles, compared with that of some other professing Denominations;—Her Separation from the National Church, occasioned, and rendered necessary by the said Avowal;—Her Practice of solemn, public Covenanting;—Her Approbation of the second Period of Reformation in Britain;—Her Opinion concerning Toleration;—And her Communion with other Churches.

In a LETTER to a CLERGYMAN,

By the Rev. W. GRAHAM, NEWCASTLE.

NEWCASTLE:

PRINTED BY M. ANGUS, FOR THE AUTHOR.

M.DCC.XC.

SECTION CHURCH

The following is a list of the names of the persons who have been elected to the office of the Secretary of the Church of the Holy Trinity, New Castle, for the year 1881. The names are given in alphabetical order. The names of the persons who have been elected to the office of the Secretary of the Church of the Holy Trinity, New Castle, for the year 1881, are given in alphabetical order.



A LETTER TO THE CHURCHMAN

By the Rev. W. GRAHAM, Newcastle.

NEWCASTLE

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE writer takes the liberty to assure his readers, that the ensuing epistolary Address was *real*; as was also the occasion of it. It is now, with some considerable additions, given to the public. His design in doing so, is, that those who find themselves entangled by similar difficulties, or urged by like temptations, may enjoy that degree of assistance, which it is calculated and candidly meant to convey to the embarrassed, and which the upright Inquirer for the *old paths* and the *good way* will always cordially welcome.

There are not a few, in the bosom of the Church of Scotland, who ly under peculiar difficulties. Weary of religious connections with a society, which, during the course of half a century, has been going backward with a perpetual backsliding, and in which the deep sighs of a respectable minority are lost in the noisy rage of a general revolt from evangelic purity and gospel order;—many are looking round them for more comfortable connections, with all that eagerness, which a case of the highest importance naturally inspires. Amidst the many fair pretensions that are made on each hand, they are justly alarmed of the most imminent dangers. Attached to truth and order, they are wisely on their guard lest they should be betrayed into a virtual abandoning of the Reformation, and a practical renunciation of the so justly admired Standards of one of the most celebrated of the Reformed Churches. Thus they are brought into the most disagreeable circumstances, and their minds are thrown upon the most painful difficulties. In their present station, they *cannot*, with pleasure,

sure, remain; and from it they dare not, with safety, remove.

Christians of this description will find some things, in this Letter, briefly suggested, which, when they are properly understood, and judiciously applied to particular cases, may be of considerable advantage to them. The steady and conscientious follower of the Lamb will see his duty pointed out, and will feel his conscience disembarrassed.

In the Secession Church, there may be many who feel themselves uneasy in her communion. They are raised, or depressed, to stations which expose them to powerful temptations, “to fall from their own steadfastness.” Prosperity sometimes solicits them; adversity more frequently prompts them to invent objections against their present religious connections. They wish to be able to keep their countenances, even when they proceed to wound their consciences. They are anxious to maintain the character of consistency and superior wisdom, at the same time they quit their religious ground, and become sincere and zealous converts to that *species* and *degree* of religious profession, which stand highest on the scale of worldly wisdom and respectability in the political clubs of the interested, or the polite circles of the gay.

Professors of this character will here find some reasons produced, which seem to be calculated to arm them against the attack of such temptations, and to look apostasy sternly in the face. They will see the reasonableness, and perhaps feel the force of the Apostolical Exhortation,—“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know your labour is not in vain in the Lord †.”

Both in the Title and in the Body of the work, the writer hath used the terms SECESSION CHURCH, or the CHURCH of the SECESSION, not that thereby he may contradistinguish that society from the once celebrated

CHURCH

CHURCH of SCOTLAND, as she was long represented by her truly venerable and reforming assemblies; and is *still* held up to view in her standards of doctrine, worship, discipline and government. From *that* Church, she has stated no secession. She is ONE with her, in her constitution, doctrine, laws, ordinances and members. Her *epithet* refers only to her present state of necessary separation from that Church, which is now in possession of the ecclesiastic emoluments in Scotland, as she is represented by her Courts of Appeal, and as she is characterized by that species of management in them, which has so long grieved the spirits of all good men and sunk her reputation, as one of the first pillars of truth, and a watchful guardian of her own sacred rights, with the liberties of her members. Notwithstanding, the Church of the Secession is happy to acknowledge the Church of Scotland to be a *true* Church of Christ, a *sister* Church, yea, her *elder* Sister. She has too high a value for her truest interests to be at any time lukewarm in promoting them. At much expence of labour and patience, she hath continued more than fifty years, to testify her regard to her welfare, by faithfully exposing and witnessing against every thing, both without her Pale, and in her Pulpits and Courts, that has a tendency to injure her real happiness. During so many years, she has approved her love to her, by voluntarily sacrificing her share in the ecclesiastical livings for her sake. So far from entertaining the smallest degree of resentment for the acknowledged injuries she has received at her hand, she continues to hazard the incurring of still greater injuries, that she may honestly acquit herself in her duty toward her, by maintaining a judicial testimony against all her deviations from her former purity,—deviations, which all disinterested men acknowledge to be, like fatal shafts, wounding her in her very vitals, and accelerating her ruin. So far from breaking up all communion with her, she labours most assiduously in the use of the only means

means to procure its restoration and perfection. She holds communion with her in the only way in which she herself has left it practicable to do it. She bears honourable witness to her former eminent reformation; and she displays the warlike banner against all of every character, who make hostile attacks upon them. She has no friends but those who are true friends to the *best interests* of the Church of Scotland; and all who are enemies to her purity and peace, whether without or within her own Pale, she accounts her mortal foes.

A CANDID VINDICATION, &c.

REV. VERY DEAR SIR,

WHEN I had the pleasure of writing to you, some months ago, I promised to give you my thoughts more fully concerning several subjects, which have been frequently topics of conversation between us, and which have of late become matter of judicial discussion between you and the Presbytery.

I am indeed heartily sorry, my dear brother, to find in your last, that you remain involved in the same difficulties, which you expressed in your paper, given in to the Presbytery in July last. I am still more sensibly touched for the situation of your mind, when I reflect upon the great pains your fathers and brethren have taken, hitherto in vain, to undeceive you, to remove your scruples, and to shew you, that their sentiments on the general subjects, at which you stumble, are not materially different from your own. They have often told you so; and I hope to make it evident, that the Spirituality of Christ's kingdom, and its Independency on all earthly jurisdictions, are truths avowed by the whole Secession Church. These truths, like axioms, are the foundations on which the whole system of the Secession Testimony is built. They are the principles of common sense, and are deducible from every possible view that can be taken of that kingdom which is not of this world. They are acknowledged in their utmost scriptural latitude by the whole Secession Body, as much as, if not more than, by any other church on earth. But, were it even true, that some, not duly attending to the original grounds and reasons of the Secession Testimony, have

have built some opinions and practices upon that precious foundation, which seem to derive their origin from very opposite principles ;—every man, who reflects on the imperfect state of human nature, is capable to make proper allowances for the mistakes of some few in a large society ; and, advert- ing to the scope of the Secession Testimony, will be at no loss to see that the principles of christian liberty are the sacred base on which it rests, and the massy columns by which it is, and ever will be supported, when every secular system of spiritual slavery must perish in its turn.

It often falls out that some parts of a superstructure are very heterogeneous to the foundation on which it rests. Wood, hay, and stubble have been, through the subtlety of Satan, and the early prejudices of the human mind, built upon the most firm foundation. Yea, sometimes, those very hands which were honoured to lay the first stones of the foundation, have been ingloriously employed in collecting and piling these despicable materials upon it. The grand object of Satan's envy and malice is the kingdom of Christ ; and his archplot, in all ages, hath been to procure by his unwearied and ever-varying devices, either to get that kingdom visibly so framed, or, at least, so represented to be so framed as that it may be, or seem to be, hostile to the natural rights of mankind, and the constitutions of civil societies. The Reformation from Popery was, like a lofty pile, erected upon a Rock. The principles of emancipation from the tyrannic yoke of Priestly Imposition were its ground-work. Yet how soon did some of the Reformed Churches forget the foundations on which they stood, impose without mercy on the consciences of their members, and persecute, even unto death, those who refused to submit to a yoke not less galling because it was forged by Protestant artists ? How quickly did they forget their own feelings, when, after they themselves had groaned under the violence of the secular power, they kindled fires to devour their own brethren. The hand of the enemy of God and men was in it. Aware of the friendly aspect which the principles of the Reformation necessarily have to the rights of mankind, both civil and religious,—he stirred up
both

both friends and enemies to fix an odium on that glorious work. But would these protestant persecutions have been a sufficient reason to have justified any in their return to the Church of Rome; or in their turning aside to the communion of any society, whose constitution, doctrines or worship was hostile to the Reformation? No man dare say it. Permit me to say, that the case is almost, if not altogether, parallel with regard to the Seession Church, and our connections with her. It ever appeared plain to me, that She acknowledges no other foundation beside that of the Reformation. Her principles are the principles of human and Christian Liberty. Honoured to espouse the seession testimony, we have said with our mouths, that we approve with our hearts these precious foundations of Protestant freedom. Various occurrences may have fallen out in the Seession Church, since her commencement, which may have aggrieved some, stumbled more, and put the greater part of both ministers and people upon a proper enquiry into their causes. In these circumstances, is it your duty or mine to desert our present connections; to refile from the Principles of Liberty, and to turn to any society, whose constitution is avowedly inimical to these principles; or to return to the communion of that Church, which cast us out for the avowal of them.

Let us suppose for a moment, that there are some things suspicious, which have, through the inadvertent, though well-intended zeal of some, been either engrossed, at the beginning, into the Secession Testimony or introduced into general practice *since*, no one knows *how*, or *why*;—yet, circumstances duly considered, can you reasonably desert your public character in the Secession Church, which affords you an opportunity of contributing your part toward either explaining or rejecting them? No, certainly. Your character obliges you to use ALL means in your power, for these ends, in your present station, without attempting to shift it, till it become no longer tenable. Were you to desert your present station, in your present circumstances, I do not see why you ought not to forsake the communion of every Christian Society on earth, one after another: For reason, and the nature of things au-

thorize me to say, that there is no Church upon earth, having a regular system of principles, but has admitted some things, beside her foundation, which, either less or more, are unfriendly to some of the original maxims on which she was at first built.

Permit me to throw what I wish to write farther on the subject of your scruples, into the following order:—

I. I shall endeavour to shew, that the Secession Church took her rise from, and is built upon those very Principles of Liberty, which you lay down as the foundation of your reasoning, in your forementioned paper.

II. I shall attempt a proof, that the denominations, to which my Dear Brother seems to be most inclined to unite himself, on the supposition of his leaving the Secession Church, have not an equal claim, with her, to be built upon those Principles; and are, on other accounts, exceptionable.

III. I shall offer you my thoughts concerning the difficulties, with which you seem to be pressed, in your continuing in the communion of the Secession Church.

I. I propose to shew, that the Secession Church took her rise from, and is built upon these very Principles of Liberty, which you lay down as the foundation of your *scruples*, concerning the propriety of continuing in your present connections.

Your Principles are, “ That the kingdom of Christ is Spiritual as to its Head, Subjects, Laws and Ends”; and “ that, viewed as immediately subject to the Redeemer alone, it is free and independent, naturally exempt from all CIVIL, as well as from all PAPAL jurisdiction.”

Permit me once more, my Dear Brother, to assure you these are not only my Principles, but, as far as I know, they meet the approbation of all our fathers and brethren in the Secession Church

I hope you will excuse me when I offer a proof of this assertion. You have made it necessary. Taking it as if it were granted, that some principles or practices, ignorantly abetted

or ill understood by some, in the Secession Church, are contrary to these important axioms, you have attempted to overthrow the whole Secession Testimony, as if it were inimical to these maxims, and to be maintained only upon their ruins, or upon the wretched principles of *Erasmus*.

But how often, in other cases, have you seen and reprobated this mode of reasoning? Have you not frequently seen a system argued down, and exposed from a chain of principles—the SAME with that on which it was originally established? How readily do politicians condemn by turns, the several modes of civil government, from Principles which have their foundation in human nature and were the very Principles on which such forms of government were originally framed? You will apprehend the reason of this, when you consider, that—

It is very possible, that the original founders of such systems laid the foundations with the best materials and in the firmest manner. It is, notwithstanding, no uncommon thing to behold their successors, blinded by ignorance, or hurried away by intemperate zeal, building very incongruous materials on these foundations. The last century exhibited many examples of this observation. In the year 1648, the professed Champions for the rights of human nature in Britain, set forward upon the Principles of Civil and Religious Liberty; but twelve years had not elapsed, when these men, or their successors in power, piled such loads of absurdity upon the foundation, as overwhelmed the whole fabric at last; buried its authors in its ruins; and left even these a perpetual monument of human folly, in attempting to blend incongruous materials in one political system.

Besides, while men contemplate such a superstructure, and observe the more absurd detached pieces of it, through ignorance, rashness, or prejudice, they are too ready to pronounce summarily concerning the whole. They may consider such a system as one continued tissue of absurdity and folly,—perhaps, of rebellion and enthusiasm. Have we not a striking proof the truth of this remark in some late histories of Mary, Queen of Scotland? From some human frailties and mistakes, from which candid and cool examiners never could expect the

first reformers to be exempt, take occasion to insinuate that the Reformation was only a successful rebellion. Your good sense and piety will prevent you from imitating such writers in your sentiments and conduct respecting the Reformation. And you are too just, to take occasion from the weaknesses of a few, to condemn the whole Secession Church, as if they maintained Principles inconsistent with the Spirituality of Christ's kingdom, and the rights of conscience, and of private judgment. That they do not will appear—because—

1. These are the grand, the fundamental Principles of the Reformation. The Secession Church approves and bears ample testimony to the necessity and glory of the Reformation, together with the Principles on which it was founded, and the purposes for which it was designed. Does my Brother doubt of it? Impossible! Especially after his having stated it as a principal objection against the Secession Testimony “that it admits the Reformation in bulk, without making a difference between what was laudable in it, and what, in this age, cannot be defended by its most zealous friends.”

But admitting that the framers of the Secession Testimony did, from reverence of the Reformation and the memory of the Reformers, inadvertently let slip some things on which they might have animadverted,—what can my Brother call it? Doubtless, an omission! But it ought to be remembered, that it brings not the Secession Church under any greater reproach than it does the Reformation itself, into which these indefensible objects found admittance; yet my Dear Brother never thought of deserting the Reformed Banners!

2. Those objects for which the Secession Church hath displayed her banner of Testimony are strictly connected with, and depend upon those axioms which respect the Spirituality of Christ's kingdom, and the spiritual freedom of all its subjects. Every man, who glances the Testimony, must be sensible of this. Why do we contend against all idolatry and superstition? Why does the Testimony assert that God is to be worshipped, only in the way and by the Ordinances of his own authoritative Prescription? Is it not that we build on these

these immoveable maxims, " that Christ's kingdom is free ;" " That God is the only Lord of the conscience ;" " That Christ's voice is only to be regarded in his own kingdom, and among his own subjects, in respect of objects purely spiritual ;" and " That no man can worship God aright without practically making his revealed will both the rule and the reason of his devotion ?"—Why do we contend against all attempts to model the Church, in her constitution and government, according to the plans on which monarchies, mixed monarchies, aristocracies, or democracies are formed ? Why do we affirm that the kingdom of Christ ought to be governed, and every thing in her administered only according to his express laws ? Is it not because we maintain that " Christ can have no compeer ;" " that his authority is absolute " and " that all office-power with which men are invested in his kingdom, is purely ministerial ?"

3. The Secession Church is not less explicit in declaring her attachment to the Principle of the Spirituality and independence of Christ's kingdom, when those objects, AGAINST which she witnesseth a good confession, are taken under consideration. Popish tyranny and Erastian encroachments are as expressly condemned in the Testimony as they are opposite to the Spirituality and freedom of the Churches. These political engines of spiritual oppression are reprobated in the most unlimited manner. All attempts therefore to employ them at any time, whether by Papists or Protestants, are to be considered as universally condemned. I need not mention Lay Patronage, the tyrannic exercise of which called forth the Secession Church to display her banners against such intrusions on the heritage of God, as were, and continue to be a disgrace to any free people. I shall only call to your remembrance that part of the Testimony which respects the glorious and ever memorable Revolution. How strongly does the Secession Church enter her protestations against that *truckling* and *trimming* humour of Churchmen, at that time, who, distractedly fond of an exclusive establishment, of any kind, sacrificed the intrinsic, spiritual power of the Church, and the sacred authority of Christ over her, at the shrine of Erastianism?

tianism? These are the express words of the Supreme Judicatory of the Secession Church—"There is not any standing Testimony against such sinful encroachments upon the Rights and Liberties of Christ's SPIRITUAL kingdom."

I am aware of the objection "that the Testimony by its loud complaints, that certain acts of Parliament, in favour of the Church, were not revived, at the Revolution, seems not to be altogether averse to Erastianism; and that the Secession Church would have made no objections to the exercise of that power, if the Revolution settlement had been to her own mind."

To the objection it is answered,—that the complaint hath not the most distant affinity with Erastianism; nor does it imply an approbation of it, in any case whatever. Erastianism is a power arrogated by Civil Legislature to model the constitution of a Church into a state of political subserviency to the state, and to govern her accordingly. This, instead of being approved, is the very thing which is condemned by the Secession Church. The complaint is,—that as these acts of Civil Legislature had been passed in a reforming age, and had guaranteed unto the Church a state, in which she was left at liberty to govern herself by the laws of her divine Sovereign, his authority was at least less invaded, and his subjects left in a much more ample possession of their Spiritual Rights than in any preceding period since the Reformation;—at the Revolution, when Providence had freed the nation in an almost miraculous manner, from the galling yokes of political tyranny and Papal jurisdiction, these Parliamentary laws were not revived as a guard to both Church and state, and as a mean of prevention from ever falling again into similar circumstances. It is plain, that even in this complaint, the Secession Church shews an uniform regard to the Spirituality and Freedom of Christ's kingdom, and an unshaken resolution to bear Testimony to the Spiritual Liberties of his subjects, left exposed by these *political omissions*.

It is true, that the Secession Church, in that, nor in any other part of her Testimony, does not directly attack the Principle respecting the lawfulness of the interference of Civil Legislature

gissature with things that immediately relate to the conscience, and are objects of pure Revelation.—But it is equally true, that she no where takes the defence of it, or even insinuates her approbation of it. The spirit of her Testimony is in diametrical opposition to every *kind*, and every *degree* of such interference ; and its evident scope is, to assert the ALONE headship of Christ, and the sacred rights of all his subjects.

4. Were it necessary to add to what hath already been suggested, to convince my Dear Brother, that the Secession Church maintains the purest Principles respecting the Spirituality of Christ's kingdom,—I might remind him of the origin and causes of the Secession. These shew, in the most undisguised manner, what were, and what still are, the sentiments of the Secession Church concerning the Spirituality of the Redeemer's kingdom. Had those worthy persons, who made that grand appearance for truth before the General Assembly and its commission from 1733 to 1739, been capable of trimming, as some have done in similar cases since, there had been no Secession Church. Had they been able, ostrich like, to have swallowed and digested the iron morsels of Erastianism, which were then thrown them in great plenty, they laboured under every temptation to have done it. Deprivation and poverty have few charms to solicit a preference to opulence and ease. Had they not a strong temptation to have eluded the former and to have enjoyed the latter, when so great a stir was raised in their favour, and a back-door was opened to court their re-entrance, in the year 1734? But you know the part they chused ! They went without the camp,—bearing the reproach of Christ ; and, after the example of Moses, preferred it to the pleasures of sin for a season. A certain proof this,—that they thoroughly understood the nature of Christ's kingdom ; and that they believed that a Church of Christ may stand sufficiently firm, without a legal exclusive establishment, upon the common foundation of institution which God hath laid in Zion.

The exercise of civil authority in the kingdom of Christ furnished the first occasion for the Secession. The intrusion of ministers upon reclaiming congregations, by the tyrannic execution

execution of the law of Patronage, called forth the fathers of the Secession to set the trumpet to their mouths against so flagrant injustice and oppression ; and their faithfulness in bearing Testimony to the Liberties of Christ's kingdom DOCTRINALLY, brought them at last into such a state as obliged them to do it JUDICIALLY. The Secession Church commenced ; Judicatories were constituted ; and a Judicial testimony to the independency and Spirituality of Christ's kingdom, was emitted. This banner, though it hath been contemned by some, and reproached by others ; though it hath sometimes been deserted by false friends, and always opposed by open enemies ; hath, notwithstanding, continued to stand for more than half a century, as a sacred monumental pillar, bearing witness to generations which shall be born,—“ that Christ is the ONLY king of Zion ;” and “ that Jerusalem, which is the mother of us all, is FREE.”

5. These truths, in fine, are expressly a principal part of the word of Testimony in the Secession Church. She declares, in opposition to all anti-government Principles, “ that some carry their zeal against defections—to the dangerous extreme of avowing the lawfulness of propagating Religion by offensive arms, quite contrary to that disposition which ought to be in all the professed followers of Christ, who came not to destroy mens lives, but to save them.”

Thus, I have attempted to point out to my Dear Brother a proof of the identity of the Principles in the Secession Church with his own, respecting the independency and Spirituality of the Mediator's visible kingdom. Indeed, I am not a little surprised that he should once imagine them to be opposite ; and still more am I astonished to find him talking of preferring the communion of some other denominations to that of the Secession Church, while he must be sensible that there is no religious description of men which has given more convincing proofs of its being founded upon these principles, and of its attachment to them. If a public, judicial Testimony for them, and the loss of almost every thing dear in society, as the reward of avowing them, can vouch any thing.—The Secession Church hath not a competitor.—But this leads me to—

The

The 2d thing which I proposed,—to attempt a proof that not one of the Religious Denominations, whom, after relinquishing his present connections, my Dear Brother appears to have most cleanness to join, hath an equal title, with the Secession Church, to claim these maxims for its principles; and that all are, on other accounts, exceptionable.

I acknowledge that I have set myself a most disagreeable task. There is nothing to which I am more averse than to making comparisons and stating contrasts between either societies or individuals. I must also beg you to take notice, that whatever I may suggest on this subject is by no means designed against the persons of any, whether ministers or private christians, of any denomination. I profess, that I love and honour the persons of many, both of a public and private character in other denominations, as much as I do any of the description of Christians to which I belong. Far, very far from grudging ministers of Christ, of every religious denomination, the honour of winning and edifying souls; one of the chief sources of my joy is to hear and see that they have many, very many, for a crown and a glory, now, and in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming.

Notwithstanding, truth is ever truth; and there are occasions when it must be honestly told. If there be any thing in Religion, if there be any certainty in Revelation, if there be any superiority of truth above error or mistake,—one denomination must be preferable to others; communion with all cannot be equally eligible.

There are three religious Denominations, to which my Dear Brother seems to give a decided preference, while he seems to be at a loss, upon a comparative view, to which of these three he shall give the right-hand of fellowship.—These are English Independents;—Scotch Presbyterians, residing in England; and the Synod of Relief in Scotland.—It is not my business to state any comparison between these; but to shew, that none of them, has an equal claim with the Secession Church, to be reckoned to be built on the Principles which assert the Independence and Spirituality of Christ's kingdom.

1. English Independents, I acknowledge, have signalized themselves, for almost two centuries, by their laudable adherence to the Doctrines of the Everlasting Gospel. While others, enamoured of novelties, and seduced by a desire of conformity to the reigning taste of a corrupt age, have made shipwreck of the Faith, harmoniously professed by all the Protestant Churches at the reformation, and have turned aside to Arianism and Socinianism; Congregationalists have generally held fast the profession of their faith, without wavering, and made some noble appearances for the peculiar Doctrines of the Gospel. Their praise is in all the Churches; and the well-earned fame of many of their ministers, as champions for the truth, may be equalled, but can be rarely exceeded. The names of a Goodwin, and an Owen, a Doddridge, and a Guise, will always be held in grateful remembrance. But, in the mean time, their peculiar tenet of INDEPENDENCY effectually precludes them from every opportunity of *judicially* asserting the freedom and Spirituality of the kingdom of Christ, as ONE Church, speaking with one mouth, and holding up the truth with all the harmony of a joint confession.

Besides, in the present disjointed state of Independents, there is not, nor can there be any proper exhibition of the Kingly authority of Christ over his own kingdom as it subsists among them. Congregations being affirmed to be, in all cases, ordinary as well as extraordinary, compleat organic Churches in and of themselves, are independent of one another; and, therefore, it is impossible, that there can be a visible display of the Spiritual authority of Christ over them as constituting ONE society, even though all the parts should equally profess their subjection to him as their Sovereign. What the *parts* do *separately*, Independency precludes the *whole* from doing *conjunctly*. It is therefore plain, that were Congregationalists ever so friendly to the truth concerning the freedom and Independency of Christ's kingdom on all secular jurisdiction, they *must not*, they *cannot* confess it, as *One Body*. The truth among them, is, as if it did not exist, for it must not be publicly confessed. No judicial banner can be displayed for it. Were hell and earth moved against it, as they

they frequently are ; and were all Churches in the same predicament as Independents—bound down to a profound silence upon the subject, unless in their private Church-meetings ;—the enemy might triumph, and the truth might be forgotten ; for Zion could not publicly and judicially confess her God !

2. Presbyterians, connected with the Church of Scotland, but residing in England, compose Religious Societies, with which my Dear Brother, in consistency with his Principles concerning the alone Headship of Christ, and the independency of his kingdom, can have as little communion as with those of the independent persuasion

(1.) These societies are ordinarily as independent of one another as the Churches of Congregationalists. Like all other dissenting denominations in England, they are, indeed, exempted from the direful effects of Lay-patronage ; but as one body, they have never, in any age, displayed a judicial banner against the tyranny of Episcopacy as the Secession Church hath done ; nor have they at any time, judicially asserted the alone Headship of Christ, in opposition to Erastian supremacy ; and the Spirituality of Christ's kingdom in opposition to the political jumble of objects civil and sacred in the constitution of the Church, established by law. Many of the ministers in these Congregations, it is true, preach the peculiar Doctrines of Christianity with becoming zeal, at which I rejoice : But neither is the necessity of Presbyterian Church-government strenuously inculcated by them, nor are the laws of Church order carried into execution in their Congregations. Synods or Presbyteries there are none, to which, as to courts of appeal, aggrieved persons or societies may have recourse. Classes there are some ; but these are not courts of appeal, or of judicature. They are only conventions of ministers (in some cases, with lay-elders) for the purpose of regulating pecuniary business relating to their funds, and the ordination of ministers in Congregations which have become vacant. Where is an instance to be found of any disorderly person being brought before these classes, as an ordinance of God for his humiliation and recovery from the error of his way? When or

where can an instance be quoted of any Class exerting its authority to compose differences in congregations, and of its using all means warranted in the Supreme Directory to bring refractory minorities to yield to the votes of their brethren? A vacant Congregation calls a candidate. A minority, impatient of being outvoted by perhaps the poorer part of the society, and purse-proud, are determined to have a minister of their own. They cannot with decency, or with hopes of succeeding, apply to their own Class, for the ordination of their candidate. The next Class in the neighbourhood is applied unto, or some Presbytery in Scotland is humbly supplicated for that purpose;—and both ordinations go forward at one and the same time. Thus, the authority of the class, within the limits of which the Congregation lies, is trampled upon by their brethren, continuing, and acknowledged by them to be their brethren still, notwithstanding the contempt they pour upon them in the face of the Sun!

(2.) I say *Brethren*; for these Presbyterians, with whom my Dear Brother prefers communion to that of his present connections, are strictly united with, and profess themselves to be members of the Church of Scotland, established by law. From this Church, my Brother well knows, the Secession Church hath separated, because, as a Church *exclusively* established, she holds these very principles, (and hath acted with a very high hand agreeably to them) with which he is justly offended, and which he mistakingly imputes to the Secession Church, as a reason of deserting her communion. I leave it with my Brother to say how preposterous it must be, to think of deserting the communion of a Church which is bearing open and judicial Testimony for the alone Headship of Christ, and the Spirituality of his kingdom, which are axioms he so much approves, in order that he may join a Church, which every day practically pours contempt on these truths by the execution of the law of Patronage, and from which, on account of her doing so, the Secession Church separated, with all the banners of a doctrinal and judicial Testimony, displayed against a conduct, not less impious than tyrannical.

That

That the ministers, at least, of these Presbyterian Congregations are members of the Church of Scotland is owned and boasted of by them. They ordinarily receive their licence in her bosom. They occasionally join with her in the celebration of her most solemn ordinances. They live in England as *expectants* of preferment in her, when their friends shall be so happy as to succeed with a Patron, or with the Minister for putting them in possession of a living. And they ordinarily avail themselves of such happy conjunctures to forsake their sorrowful flocks and their precarious salaries, to intrude themselves upon a *reluctant* parish and a *legal* stipend. I could name Congregations which, in the course of seven or eight years, were, in this manner, thrice deprived of their ministers; and thrice obliged, at a great expence, and after many rents and convulsions, to furnish themselves from the same nursery!

Thus, these ministers practically approve the law of lay-patronage: A law which subverts the laws of the Redeemer, and tramples down his authority as he is King in Zion: A law which arises from an incorporation of the church and state in one political system, and from an unhallowed coalition of objects purely Spiritual with those which are merely political and earthly: A law, in short, which, not to mention all its pernicious effects and consequences in the Church, directly destroys all those maxims respecting the independency and Spirituality of Christ's kingdom on which my Brother justly lays so much weight*. Can he therefore consistently hold communion with those who are members and ministers of a Church which every day carries that law into execution, with all that unrelenting rigour peculiar to ecclesiastical Courts? Can he consistently prefer the communion of such to the communion of those who were cast out of her bosom, with all the marks of violence and ecclesiastical fury, merely for testifying against that law, and bearing witness to the sole Headship of their

* The Reader may see the direful consequences of the law of Patronage enumerated in a Treatise, published by the Author, entitled—An attempt to prove that every species of Patronage is foreign to the nature of the Church, &c.—Printed by Gray and Alston, 1768.

their divine Lord, and the immediate subjection of his kingdom to his authority? Impossible!

3. The Synod of Relief in Scotland is that society to which you seem to be most attached, on the supposition of your deserting the communion of the Secession Church. On that account, I shall take the liberty to write more fully on this than I thought was necessary on the two preceding articles.

(1.) It is a fact, which all the world knows, that the ministers of that denomination did not forsake the communion of the established Church from any distinguishing attachment they had to my Dear Brother's principles concerning the constitution of the Church of Christ and his sole authority in her. For any thing they have ever told the world to the contrary, in a judicial capacity, they cordially approve the coalition of things civil and sacred in the constitution of the Church. Yes; in so far as they have born no due Testimony against it, we are left certainly to conclude that they do approve it. So far as I know, that Synod hath never declared itself an advocate for the Divine right which Church members have to chuse the ministers and means of their own edification. The chief fault they find in Patronage, is, that the execution of that law is not in their own hands, or under the controul of their friends in the communion of the Church.

Now charity obliges me to believe, that you both know and approve the spirit of your own Principles, and are determined to act up to it. All the world will therefore account you the most inconsistent of men, if you should prefer the communion of a Society which hath given no public evidence that it approves your principles, to that of one which makes them the principal word of its Testimony; with which you have maintained the strictest friendship these many years; and in which you received both your licence and your ordination.

(2.) The Synod of Relief is not a society with which, on other accounts, you can consistently unite yourself. There is no branch of Erastianism, against which they bear any public, judicial Testimony. There is nothing, in either former or present times, which, even though it flow ever so plainly from that

that poisonous fountain of incorporating the constitution of the Church with that of the state, appears to be a matter of grievance to them. This is of undeniable notoricity. Now, if the Associate Synod be, in your judgment, blameable for omitting, in their Testimony, a particular condemnation of some few mistaken steps taken between the years 1638 and 1650; and if you scruple communion with them upon that account, fearing that the *omission* implies an *approbation* of them, in spite of their most explicit declarations of the contrary;—How can you consistently think of bettering yourself by joining in communion with those, who are not chargeable indeed with a *simple omission*, but are guilty of making an *entire blank* of a Testimony for the truths and ordinances of Christ, as they were maintained in that reforming period? 'Tis true, the ministers of that denomination preach the gospel, and condemn many errors and abuses *doctrinally*; but do not the ministers of the Secession Church the same,—and much more? A doctrinal declaration of the truth, and a mere pulpit condemnation of errors, though they be all that a single minister *can* do, are not all that a body of ministers *should* do, when a divine Providence hath erected them into a court, and put it in their power to act in a judicative capacity. If the practice of the apostles and first churches, with that of the friends of God and truth, in all ages, is an example worthy of imitation,—they ought to have judiciously displayed their banners in the name of the great Captain of Salvation, and avowed themselves the friends of truth, and the determined foes of every false and wicked way, by a judicial Testimony, clear as the body of the sun, and pointed as his rays.

(3.) I do not see a reason for the existence of the Synod of Relief, under that distinguishing character. By the designation they assume, they charitably hold forth relief to the aggrieved, and invite those who are sore burthened to expect deliverance from loads under which they groan. The doors of Relief Churches are thrown open that those who are straitened in their consciences, in continuing members of, and holding communion with the established Church, may be freed from these overwhelming grievances. Do they answer this high character?

character? Do they equal the expectations which their denomination calls forth? Nothing less: For do they not, at the same time, invite all whom the latitude and lukewarmness of modern charity honour with the appellation of *good men*, both within and without the pale of the established Church, to hold communion with them? Do they not thus leave the consciences of men, embarrassed in the painful dilemma, whether it be a Sin or a Duty to continue in the communion of the Church? Why do they thus slur over a matter of such consequence, and refuse to set the trumpet to their mouths, give a certain and distinct sound, and expressly say what Christians ought to do? If it be a Sin,—then, why do they admit to solemn ordinances those, who, holding communion with their parish ministers, though gross intruders on the heritage of God, are confessedly guilty of that sin; who purpose to remain in the annual commission of it; and who cannot but secretly condemn in their consciences their fellow-communicants who have deserted their parish churches? If, on the other hand, it be a Duty to continue in the communion of the Church,—why do they pretend to erect a Synod, Presbyteries, and Church-consistories in the name of Christ to *relieve* men from their DUTY, and to administer solemn ordinances to them not only guilty of sin, but confessedly guilty of it in their seeking to obtain the enjoyment of ordinances in a different, yea opposite communion?

Farther, if those whom they thus admit to their communion, do not see it to be their duty to forsake the communion of the established Church;—why do they pretend to *relieve* them? Are they seeking any *relief* from them? At most, supposing them disaffected to their parish incumbent, would they not be equally well *relieved* by going to the neighbouring parish, where the minister is more generally acceptable? On the other hand, if their people, or any of them, see it to be their duty to leave the communion of the established Church, is it an honest and fair way to *relieve* such, to *betray* them back into that very communion, which they wish to fly, by admitting those from whose communion they seek relief to participate of the sacred Symbols, in all the intimacy of Christian
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communion with them ! This is astonishing in the extreme ; and seems to be a striking evidence of the infatuation with which the present lukewarm age is distinguished, when Christians of knowledge, piety, and even zeal for the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, suffer themselves to be drawn into inconsistencies so glaring and absurd !

(4) Once more, I cannot see the consistence of either the Relief Ministers, or their people, as to communion.

It is notour, that a great part of the people, who are members of Relief Churches, consider themselves as members of the Established Church, and hold communion with her in the participation of the Ordinance of the Supper. This amounts to a solemn declaration of an agreement to walk with her in the observance of the same ecclesiastic as well as moral conduct. But with what consistence can they do this ? Can they walk with her in all the cordiality of consent to the deposition of their own ministers ? Is not their communion in *silence* with her a solemn profession of agreement with her in the steps her judicatories have taken in making them no ministers of the Church, and in incapacitating them from ever receiving a presentation to a benefice in her ?

Again, how can the relief ministers hold communion with the professed members of that Church which has treated them in the manner she hath ? If people be ignorant of it, ministers certainly know, that communion in particular Churches implies an agreement to discharge those duties which Church members owe to their common Lord, and to one another, as his professed subjects. Now, Relief Ministers hold communion with those very persons who communicate in the Established Church,—that very Church which hath thrown them out and incapacitated them from ever becoming ministers in her communion. The obvious consequence is, they hereby consent to their own deposition, and allow that it was a duty of love she owed her Head, herself and them to exclude them, as ministers, from her pale.

Thus, these amphibious communicants, like the middle link of a chain, unite the General Assembly and the Synod of Relief in a virtual, though most solemn agreement as to

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Church acts ; and, in all cases, where no competent means of exoneration are used, to a mutual consent to each other's ecclesiastical administration.

III. I come now to offer my thoughts concerning those difficulties which my Dear Brother says have so long and so much gruelled him about continuing in the communion of the Secession Church.

As far as I can remember, the following things seem chiefly to stumble you. First, you alledge that the cause of the separation of the Secession Church from the communion of the Church of Scotland was not of sufficient weight. And you produce as the reason of your scruple, that if it was sufficient, the Secession ought to have commenced some years before, seeing acts of Assembly, equally, if not more alarming and unfriendly to the truest interests of Christianity had been passed without their occasioning any separation. The act which respected the Marrow of Modern Divinity, you say, was of more dangerous tendency than all the acts of Assembly which respected the persons or cause of the first promoters of the Secession, or the first ministers of the Secession Church.

I shall attempt an answer, after laying down a few axioms.

1. Separation from a Church of Christ ought never to be attempted but upon the most stable and indisputable grounds. In this age, separations, divisions, and sub-divisions seem to have become a matter of common occurrence. In the most wanton manner, and for the slightest causes, Christians who have walked together in the most delightful and profitable harmony in the communion of saints, will break up their Church connections with all that indifference with which common copartnerships in trade are broken off. But it was not so from the beginning. Even from the Church of Rome, the Protestant Churches made no undue haste in their separations. They remained in her communion till the inexorable law of necessity obliged them to seek purer connections.

2. Neither error in the doctrine, corruption in the worship, nor acts of tyranny in the government of a Church will warrant separation from her, as long as she, or the corrupt majority

majority does not oblige the purer minority to profess an approbation of what is amiss, and does not preclude them the liberty of bearing proper Testimony for God and truth, in a state of union with her.

A doctrine contrary to this maxim is fraught with absurdity ; and a practice opposite to it would be, yea frequently is attended with the worst consequences. When men lay it down as a principle that a Church must be abandoned when ever error in doctrine, corruption in worship, or acts of tyranny are to be found in her,—the worst consequences follow. Men of weak understandings, but of tender consciences, are ready to interpret every thing that appears to them to be wrong, to be one or other of these evils ; and from the most laudable attachments are obliged to become Separatists : And as no church upon earth ever was, or ever can be totally exempt from these, or an imputation of these, an end must be put to communion on earth, even among the most valuable class of Christians. On the other hand, men, actuated by a spirit of pride, ambition, impatience of contradiction, and rebellion against the laws of sound and salutary discipline, would all, in their turn, avail themselves of the same principle ; all the Churches of Christ upon earth would be rent into almost as many pieces as there are members ; and out of so extensive ruins, not one Church could be erected with the rational hopes that she would outlive the year of her commencement. Indeed, it seems to be this principle which is spreading, at this day, so much devastation and ruin among all the Churches, especially in the island of Great Britain. Division and schism deform, almost every where, the glory and beauty of the Churches, and expose the Christian religion, and the societies who are honoured to make even the purest profession of it, to the scorn of infidels and the severest reproaches of their numerous enemies. The thought is most painful and alarming,—that the more pure any Church is, the more is she liable to be torn to pieces and ruined by such a Principle. The members of a society, settled on their lees, have not their attention turned to religious concerns ; but in a Church, where Religion is, or is professed to be, the ONE

thing needful, the members never consider themselves as acting so much in character as when they are making their zeal to flame forth for the truths of Religion and the purity of divine institutions. If therefore the Principle be admitted as true, that errors and deviations are in the first instance a ground of, and a call to separation, members of such a description must necessarily be alarmed; and, as every man must judge for himself, he who thinks, or is persuaded by some sly Demagogue to think, that the alarm is just, *must* that moment, on pain of being wanting in his duty, become a Separatist: And if one *must*, all *ought*, in similar circumstances, to forsake the communion of saints, in that society, and eventually to annihilate its Church-state. Thus a speedy end would be put to the existence of all Churches on earth.

3. The principal cause of a justifiable separation from a Church is, when, after deviations from her original standards containing the *original contract*, or *bond* of union, have obtained, she, or a corrupt majority in her, obliges, or attempts to oblige the minority to approve these, either openly and expressly, or tacitly and by interpretation: Openly, by requiring a conformity, either in sentiment or practice to innovations; or, tacitly by denying to the minority a liberty of adequately exonerating themselves by duly testifying against them.

Common sense dictates it as a *first* Principle, that no Church, sacred though her character be, can be in a worse situation, in relation to her members, than any other society in regard of its constituents. Civil combinations are understood to be dissolved, when a majority happening to have the administration in its hands, breaks through the original contract. Minority, in this case, after using in vain every effort to obtain redress, may consider the union as annihilated and may peaceably withdraw. The case of Churches is parallel. The ancient puritans in England were originally members of the English Church. They continued such, till the original contract was broken by her bishops; and till these not only demanded conformity of sentiment and practice to certain idle rites and ceremonies from all her members, but

but denied them the liberty of duly exonerating themselves by an adequate Testimony against such innovations.

Now, Dear Brother, from these maxims it will appear that the Secession Church had abundant reason to justify her Secession from the Church of Scotland, at the precise time it commenced; and that it could not have been justified, if it had begun at any prior period.

(1.) The first ministers of the Secession Church had abundant reason for their separation at the precise time it commenced. It is matter of notoriety that, agreeably to the third maxim, not only deviations from the standards of the Church of Scotland had obtained in her courts, and diffusively throughout the whole body, but liberty was denied to the minority to bear open Testimony, in their stations, against the breach made upon the original contract. Four ministers were suspended, in 1773 for maintaining the right they had of bearing Testimony in their *doctrine* against the infractions made upon it. And in 1740 eight ministers, driven to erect themselves into a Presbytery, were deposed for *judicially* bearing witness to the original bond of union, and for asserting the right of ministers and Church-members to Testify against her acknowledged deviations. By these deeds of the General Assembly, the Church shut the door upon these ministers, and precluded every man from the liberty of Testifying for God and truth, in opposition to her many and flagrant infractions of the original contract. She bound down her ministers and members silently to approve her courses of backsliding from her former purity, and haughtily refused them their right of preserving their own garments clean, while they continued in ministerial and Christian communion with the majority. Thus a Secession was rendered at that time indispensably necessary *.—But

(2.) It could not have taken place upon justifiable grounds, at any prior period. What my Brother alledges, in reference to the condemnation of the *Marrow of Modern Divinity*, is in part very just. It was a most violent attack made upon some
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* Vid. Mr W. Wilson's Defence and Continuation.

of the characteristical Doctrines of the Christian Religion.— But the door was not yet shut against protests in Judicatories, nor were ministers yet censured for preaching against acts of Assembly, which the Church herself became afterward ashamed of. A Testimony for truth was honourably maintained by its friends, in a state of communion with her in the participation of divine ordinances. Agreeably, therefore, to the second axiom, a separation from her, in these circumstances, would have been as condemnable, as it was justifiable, when circumstances underwent so great a change, a few years afterward.

SECONDLY, You cannot see a solid reason to warrant the practice of national covenanting under the New Testament dispensation.

I answer, neither do I ;—if these terms be understood in the Jewish or Erastian sense in which they seem to have been used by some in the last century ; and are still, to this day, by some of anti-government Principles. I consider these notions of that duty to be absurd in the extreme ; and to be pregnant with every thing which at first concurred to form the anti-christian kingdom.

But my Brother well knows that the Secession Church does not admit that sense. No ; there is another sense in which she understands them, entirely conformable to the scripture idea of the New Testament Church. National Covenanting under the New Testament dispensation, when the Churches of Christ are *many*, and limited by no national boundaries, is “ an agreement among all, or the greater part of particular Churches throughout a nation, to strengthen one another’s hands, and encourage one another’s hearts in mutual fellowship, walking by the same rule, and minding the same things.”

If some have used the terms in a loose, indeterminate sense, it is no more than what most speakers and writers have done with particular phrases upon almost every subject, till it was found to be necessary, because of their abuse, either to *define*, or to *disuse* them.

Covenanting is not only lawful, but incumbent on
Churches ;

Churches ; especially under the New Testament dispensation, when a spirit of union and harmony ought to be manifested by them, in consequence of the more abundant effusion of the Holy Ghost upon them. Covenanting, according to the description just now given, is expressly commanded by the divine Sovereign of all the Churches. Has he not enjoined it upon them to be of one mind, to walk by the same rule and to affect the same things ? Have not some of the first Churches practised it, while “ they gave themselves to the Lord,” as their supreme Lawgiver, and “ to the apostles” as his extraordinary ministers *. Yea, did not all the primitive Churches do so, while by frequent and mutual messages and messengers they walked in the fellowship of the Spirit with one another ? Swearing to the subject matter of the agreement or Covenant, though it be a most solemn action in itself, is, in regard of the *compact* or covenant, a mere Circumstance. Yes, it is a circumstance, which being lawful in itself, becomes expedient or inexpedient according to the concomitant circumstances of persons, places and times. You refuse not the lawfulness of swearing, when a person is lawfully called to it ; nor its *expediency* when circumstances concur to point it out. Marriage between two persons among the people called Quakers is a matrimonial covenant, even though no oath intervene. Yet you never hesitated about either the lawfulness or the expediency of solemnizing marriage by an oath taken of the parties, in order to impress upon them a deeper and more awful sense of the matrimonial ties. In like manner, I see no reason, while circumstances concur to point out its expediency, why swearing may not be used in rendering more solemn a covenant between two or more Churches, as well as in solemnizing a contract of marriage between two persons, or a league between two nations †.

THIRDLY, You are offended that the Secession Church seems to approve and adopt the second reforming period from
1638

* 2 Cor. viii. 5.

† If the Reader wish to see the duty of Covenanting more fully vindicated and explained, he may consult the author's four sermons on the subject.—Printed by John Bryce, Glasgow.

1638 to 1650 in the gross, without making the necessary distinctions between what was laudable and what was condemnable in that severe struggle.

My Dear Brother must allow me to say that this is no reason why he should entertain one thought of forsaking the communion of the Secession Church ;—for

1. If there be any thing approved in that period which is contrary to scripture, and other declared principles of the Synod, concerning the independence and Spirituality of Christ's kingdom, as a member of Synod, he has a right to point it out, and to insist to have it rectified. The Synod never called their Testimony, to either the first or second Reformation, infallible ; and they would no doubt gladly yield to any correction of it, when it was pointed out to them as necessary.

2. If there was any thing culpable, as no doubt there was, in the management of these eminent Reformers, it should satisfy my Brother, that the Synod have thrown in sufficient caveats, in all their public papers, against their being understood to approve them. This will appear from their frequently reprobating Erastianism in all the modes and forms in which it hath appeared ; and from their own express words * concerning that period of Reformation. “ But since the Church militant is in an imperfect state, it is not hereby intended to affirm, that under the above-mentioned period, there was nothing defective or wanting as to the beauty and order of the house of God ; or that there was nothing culpable in the administration. All that is designed is, to declare that this Church endeavoured and mercifully attained a considerable pitch of Reformation, during the aforesaid period ”—It was not necessary to say more. They did not chuse to rake in the weaknesses of these worthy persons ; to diminish any thing from their venerable characters ; and like the Hams of that and of this age, to be impiously industrious to uncover the nakedness of those Fathers whom God honoured, like Noah, to save both a Church and a nation from being deluged and drowned by the flood of civil despotism and Papal tyranny.

FOURTHLY,

* Act and Testimony. Page 20.

FOURTHLY, You say that the Secession Church maintains Principles, which are unfriendly to liberty, and tend to persecution. Your reason is,—she testifies against *toleration*.

I answer; whatever may be ignorantly or maliciously imputed to the Secession Church, I think I am authorized to say, that there are no persecuting Principles in her. It is a gross mistake when it is imagined, that she either is unfriendly to toleration in general, or hostile to the toleration of any denomination of Protestant Dissenters in particular. Let the places in the Testimony, where the subject of toleration is discussed, be candidly consulted, and the mistake will appear.

It may be observed, that she never hints the smallest degree of dislike to a negative toleration, which indeed is the only species of toleration which my Brother can approve, according to the spirit of his own Principles. Nay more! He sees the Secession Church testifying to all the world her approbation of it, by her daily availing herself thankfully of it. Why otherwise should she peaceably take her place among other tolerated denominations; sit with a heart full of gratitude and loyalty to the powers that are, under her own vine and her own fig tree; and daily bless her God and her Prince for the undisturbed enjoyment of her civil privileges!

A positive toleration of a Religious society is an object of a very different kind. It is an express, positive and exclusive establishment of it. It is described and defined: It is contra-distinguished from all other denominations: It receives an establishment in preference to, and exclusive of all others: And it differs in nothing from a Church established by law, or the national Church, but in its wanting her name and temporal emoluments.

Against toleration, in this point of view, I acknowledge the Secession Church bears ample Testimony. There are three reasons why she does so, all of which my Brother must certainly approve, agreeably to the spirit of his own Principles.

1. A positive toleration is an *exclusive* establishment of the tolerated Denomination. All *exclusive* establishments are unlawful. While they put one certain description of subjects in the limited, or unlimited possession of their natural and civil

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rights, they deprive other subjects, equally deserving of the governing powers, of their natural and civil rights, merely because they cannot subscribe to the national creed, or submit to the national ritual ;—a reason entirely foreign to the cognizance of civil Legislature.

2. A positive toleration is an exclusive establishment of iniquity by a law, even in the eye of Legislature which grants it. Whatever the Principles of the tolerated denominations may be, whether they be true or false, right or wrong, in themselves, they are false and wrong in the public judgment of the Legislature, otherwise they would be nationally established : But being false or wrong in the eye of the Legislative powers, they are only tolerated ;—that is, they are defined, the sect is described, and the denomination is exclusively established in the safe and public profession of their *false* creed, only without the respectable name of the Church, and the more solid emoluments of Church benefices.

3. In fine, the Secession Church is no friend to positive toleration, because it hath been always used for wrong, or at least, suspicious purposes. The aspiring monarchs of the last century availed themselves of it, as a political engine to introduce despotism and Popery. For the same detestable ends was it granted to the friends of the exiled family of Stuart, in Scotland, in the latter end of Queen Ann's reign. The Secession Church is not the only society that has shewed its dislike to this Trojan machine. Every firm Protestant and every friend to the Hanoverian family, now on the British throne, is as loud as the most zealous Seceder in crying—

—————Equo ne credite Teucri :
Quicquid est, timeo Danaos, et dona ferentes.

FIFTHLY, Your last scruple turns on the hinge of the practice which obtains in the Secession Church with respect to Church communion. You alledge, that she is too confined in her communion, and strict in her terms of admission to it : That she approaches to the practice of the ancient Donatists, who refused to communicate with all other Churches, and denied

nied the communion to Christians of all other denominations, and that she, thereby, cuts herself off from being reckoned a part of the universal Church of Christ on earth.

This I acknowledge is to many, beside my Dear Brother, the weightiest objection against even joining, as well as continuing in the Secession Church. I shall therefore deliver my thoughts more at large concerning it.

In general, I think Christians cannot be too cautious upon a point so interesting and so delicate. Extremes on either hand are exceedingly dangerous. The modern *Syncretism*, or the fashionable Latitudinarianism of the present age, is equally to be dreaded as the ancient *Donatism* of the *African Churches*. By the last, a Church may be injurious to herself, and uncharitable to her sister Churches: But by the first, Churches, by neglecting to admonish one another; by not bearing proper Testimony for truth, and for the purity of divine institutions, in opposition to the errors and corruptions of other Churches; and by fondly flattering other societies, in their courses of deviation from the only supreme standard of all excellence, by holding communion with them;—may both lose their own purity, and have a very active and sinful hand in corrupting other Churches. In this case, they sacrifice those real, substantial and permanent advantages which flow from a faithful discharge of their duty mutually to one another, to advantages merely ideal which flow from a participation of the same ordinances, in a state in which they have mutually conspired to flatter and corrupt one another. Communion in the participation of the same ordinances is, in this case, rather a *conspiracy* against their own edification, than the communion of saints. It is an agreement to supersede the due performance of those duties to one another, which their common Lord hath bound upon them, as organic parts of the Catholic Church. Yet, preposterous to relate! It is an agreement virtually to renounce all *relation* to and *communion* with one another as parts of the Catholic Church, by their mutually consenting to neglect those duties and offices of love, in the discharge of which the *communion of Churches* principally consisteth.

If my Dear Brother will be pleased to reflect for a moment on the history of the Churches in the fourth and fifth centuries, he will find, that after *Constantine* had made the Christian Church, like the Roman Empire, Catholic, the fathers in that age, grown giddy with worldly prosperity, thought, spake and wrote of nothing but the CATHOLIC Church, as the *seat* of all ordinances, and the *centre* of all communion. They talked of nothing but of communion with the Catholic Church, out of which, they averred, there was no salvation. They gloried in nothing but in myriads of Catholic Christians crowding into the bosom of the Catholic Church at once. They forgot that particular Churches had ever existed, unless under the form of *Metropolitan* or *Diocesan*, which they considered as the distinguished parts of one great organic WHOLE, which, like a great *vortex*, swallowed up all particular Churches; and, like the supreme head of the Roman Empire, subjected them to one another, in an hierarchical order, as its constituent parts. Catholic communion,—Catholic Christians, —Catholic ordinances,—a Catholic organical Church,—and a Catholic Pastor,—became all orthodox correlates, harmoniously adjusted to, and hanging on one another like the links of a chain.

On the other hand, if my Brother pleases to turn his thoughts to the two or three first centuries of Christianity, he will observe that there is a profound silence about all this wonderful Catholicism. Particular Churches continued as in the Apostolic age, to avow their mutual relation to one another, as sister Churches, subject only to Christ, their common Lord. Their communion consisted in holding up the word of truth to one another; in writing hortatory, consolatory or congratulatory letters to one another mutually, as occasions offered;—and even by refusing to communicate in the same ordinances with some sister Churches, or with their members, that they might be ashamed, when they walked not according to the Gospel.

I hope my Brother will excuse me when I say, that, upon a serious review of matters, respecting communion at this day, I am very much afraid, that all this clamorous noise about

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Catholic communion is a device of the old DECEIVER to restore HIS *Catholic Church* to its ancient glory: A device, to which, as it prospered so well in the seventh century, he must be sanguinely attached in the seventeenth, when some men of all denominations seem to vie with one another in their zeal for its success. One thing, however, all the world knows, and good men lament, that this Catholicism of communion has succeeded greatly in lessening the zeal of Christians for the most important truths of Christianity, and for the purity of divine institutions. When Satan shall have so far got his device carried into execution as to plunge Christians into either scepticism, or an indifferency about the truths and institutions of the gospel, he will not find it to be difficult to establish a Catholic Church to his mind. For, I repeat it, that Catholic communion infers a Catholic organized Church; and this last supposes the absolute necessity of a Catholic or universal Pastor. When the *distinction* of particular Churches, and their relation to one another as sister Churches, shall be lost, either in a towering hierarchy or in the undistinguished chaos of promiscuous Catholic communion in the participation of the same ordinances.—Popery will again triumph;—the catholic kingdom of Antichrist will be restored to its ancient splendour;—nothing will be wanting to the perfection of that *Babel* but to bring forth the copestone, in the consecration of a catholic pastor, with shouting, crying, WHO IS LIKE UNTO THE BEAST!

I shall venture to offer you my thoughts upon this subject, more particularly in the following propositions.

PROPOSITION I. There are various kinds of communion in the Church of Christ, agreeable to the various relations, or kinds of union which obtain in her.

It is certain, that there are other kinds of communion in the Church besides that which consists in the participation of the same ordinances; otherwise it would be confined indeed. How few particular Churches have access to this species of communion with one another? Have they therefore no communion at all? Yes; they make but one Church, and as organized parts of that society, they are members one of another.

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However distant as to place, and different as to particular sentiments,—while they subject themselves to one Lord Jesus, make profession of one faith, and submit to one baptism, they are one Church of the living God. United visibly to one Head by a *profession* of subjection to him, and to one another by the *similarity* of that profession, they constitute but one universal, sacred society.

Now, as the visible *unity* of the Churches consisteth in the *similarity* of their visible profession of subjection to their common Lord, their communion founded upon it consisteth in their discharging all those duties and offices of love to one another, which arise from their union to one Head; and it is more or less perfect in *kinds* and *degrees*, in *exact proportion* to the degrees of that *similarity* which obtains in their professions.

Proposition II. Communion among the Churches of Christ is a very extensive and comprehensive subject.—An enlarged mind will extend its views of it beyond the narrow limits of communion in the participation of the same ordinances, which is enjoyed ordinarily *only* by the members of one Church with one another; is attainable only imperfectly and occasionally by only a *few* members of several Churches; and must be ever impracticable to *all* the members of *all* the Churches, while they are on earth.

Communion seems to consist in the EXERCISE and practical PROOFS of that reciprocal love which Christ hath so strictly commanded, and made characteristical of all his disciples. All the acts and offices of love flow in three different channels, which, while they all contain the same sacred stream, diversify themselves according to the nature and circumstances of the objects, to which they are severally related. These are *Benevolence*, *Beneficence*, and *Complacence*.

1. BENEVOLENCE includes in it all those warm wishes and fervent desires after the happiness of others, which are either secretly cherished in the heart, or break forth by the lips in earnest supplications and intercessions for the peace and prosperity of Jerusalem. Though the outlets of this sacred channel be comparatively few, yet they are both of the utmost importance, and of the largest extent. The fervour of affection which Churches ought mutually to manifest by their unwea-

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ried prayers and praises for one another's felicity is of no small importance to their mutual edification. Nor is this confined to Churches inhabiting certain climes, or distinguished by certain names. It is co-extended with the whole Catholic Church on earth; and embraceth every society within her pale, according to its distinguishing circumstances.

2. *BENEFICENCE* flows, in a vast channel, and like a copious river, sends forth a greater number of pleasant and profitable streams. Yet it spends itself within a much less extensive circle. It is true, all the Churches are bound, according to their opportunity, to do good to each other reciprocally; but the vast extent of the kingdom of Christ, joined to numberless other circumstances, prevents it from ever becoming *possible* for them to make their kind wishes and their good deeds to be of equal extent.

The proofs of beneficence are exceedingly numerous. All things by which Churches mutually edify one another may be reckoned the fruits of that characteristical virtue. Among a thousand other kind offices which they ought mutually to perform, that of both *professionally* and *practically* holding forth the truths of Christianity and the purity of its institutions to one another is none of the least. By this, they give their joint Testimony to the transcendent glory of the Christian religion, and against the slightest deviations from its purity, whenever they take place in any of them. As admonition and reproof, yea withdrawing from an offending brother, when conducted according to the sacred laws of charity, are fruits and proofs of brotherly love; so holding forth the truth to erring Churches, admonishing and reproofing them, yea, withdrawing from communion with them in the same ordinances, that they may be ashamed, are the genuine effects of that beneficence which these sacred societies indispensibly owe to one another.

It is therefore plain, that that species of communion which consisteth in the participation of the same ordinances is not the *only*, nor even the most important kind of communion among the Churches of Christ. No; it is more properly the communion of *Church members* in one particular Church, than
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the communion of Churches, and of *their members* with one another. Distance of place,—the hostile state of nations,—difference of sentiment with regard to divine things,—and improper terms of communion—may all conspire to render it in some cases *impracticable*, and in others, *inconsistent* with other acts and offices of love which are of infinitely greater importance in themselves, and of indispensable necessity in regard of obligation.

3. COMPLACENCE is delight founded in esteem. More largely; it is that species of Christian affection to the saints, which consisteth in an high esteem of their persons, as credibly the members of Christ's mystical body, and fellow heirs of the eternal inheritance.

It is hence evident, that persons or societies *only*, of credible worth, can be the distinguished objects of this virtue. And it is farther evident, that the degree of evidence, or, credibility of worth is its exact measure. Whence it is obvious, that as true worth is rare, and its proofs not frequent, complacence cannot be so extensive as either benevolence or beneficence yet its fruits are more mellow and delicious, because of that mixture and reciprocation of affection, which worthy persons, and virtuous societies have to one another.

Among other methods of Christ's appointment for exercising the love of complacence, communion in the participation of the same ordinances, in solemn Church-worship, seems to possess a principal place. In solemn intercessions, in all acts of eucharistical service, and especially in mutual fellowship at a communion table, Church members visibly acknowledge and receive Jesus Christ as their common Mediator and divine Head, and their fellow worshippers as a part of his Body, and their brethren, because of their *credible* relation to him.

It is hence obvious, that communion in the participation of the same ordinances was never intended by our Lord to be so extensive as some have vainly imagined :—for,

1. It belongs to, and is the fruit of that complacence which saints have in one another, and which must always be regularly built upon *approved* worth. But how rare are these proofs ! How confined is our knowledge of them. Do we
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know the thousandth person, especially in other Churches, who makes profession of Christianity, and credibly approves his profession to be genuine and sincere? Or, is their approved worth so easily discovered, that Christians may make it at all times, and in all societies, a foundation for solemnly avowing and sealing their complacency in them, as the members of Christ, their brethren in him, and the fellow-heirs of the same inheritance?

2. Communion, consisting in the participation of the same ordinances is not properly the communion of Churches, or of the members of different Churches. It is the communion of the members of *one* Church with one another, founded on a mutual esteem of one another, as the credible members of one Body. The Lord's supper was never intended that two or more Churches, as such, should sit down at one communion Table, and there make solemn *profession* of their receiving one another as sister Churches. No; it was designed that Church members, as such, should there receive in a solemn manner the Lord Jesus as their Head, and their fellow communicants as his members. The *first* they solemnly receive, as worthy of their highest esteem, on the Testimony of the eternal Father; and the *latter*, as worthy to be accounted brethren, because of the evidence they have given of their credible character by their abounding in all the duties of Christians and of Church members in their ordinary conduct in the world, and in their daily conversation with their brethren.

To the preceding chain of reasoning my Brother may possibly offer two objections.

1. He may alledge that "though two Churches do not harmonize in all things, yet their members may lawfully have communion together in the participation of the same ordinances, as an evidence and seal of their agreement in some things."—
I answer,

(1.) Let us suppose that two or more Churches disagree in many things, provided they have at no time made these things a subject of Testimony, I readily own their members may have intimate fellowship with one another in the participation of the same ordinances. The case is similar to that

in one particular Church, when her members agree to leave certain things among them as objects of mutual forbearance.

But supposing these Churches, after a Testimony has been duly displayed against what may have been accounted wrong in any of them, to remain inflexible in their own sentiments or practices, their members cannot communicate consistently in the participation of the same ordinances. They would thereby solemnly profess a complacency in one another, as walking by the same rule, and as minding the same things, which is NOT true,

But, in the case supposed, though they cannot consistently hold that species of communion, we are not to imagine that they can have no communion at all. No; there are other not less important acts of communion and offices of love which they owe to one another, and which, in their circumstances, they are indispensably bound to perform. They are still the objects of mutual benevolence and beneficence, with all their precious fruits. Yea, they are the objects of mutual complacency, though not in so great a degree as if they harmonized in the acknowledgment of the truth. Whereunto they have attained, they are to walk by the same sacred rule, and to mind the same important objects; and as long as in any thing they are otherwise minded, they are to wait with patience in prayer, and in the use of appointed means, till it shall please the Lord to convince the mistaken society of the truth.

(2.) Unless the preceding chain of reasoning be allowed, communion in the participation of the same ordinances be hove to be co-extended with the Catholic Church, and to be maintained with ALL the denominations that agree in the common appellation of CHRISTIAN. All agree in some things; and the greater part, (blessed be the Lord) in more, and in more important things than those in which they differ.

2. It may be objected, that if my chain of reasoning prove any thing, it proves too much;—that it will prove that there can be no such thing as communion in any Church, seeing not only do societies disagree, but two men can scarcely be found whose creeds are alike in all things.—I answer,

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(1.) When I speak of agreement as the basis of communion in ordinances, I assert no more than what my Brother, with all sensible writers on the subject, allows. In your last letter, you say that a Church State cannot subsist without an agreement in the great lines of Christianity. Indeed where there is no agreement or acquiescence in the original bond of union, I know no good end communion could answer. Every act of communion reduplicates on the original contract among the members of the society; wherefore, if any in it, or of any other society, desiring communion with it, shall dissent from the original bond of incorporation, their communion is fellowship in a LIE.

2. Yet, when I speak of agreement, I do not understand such as excludes all diversity of sentiment about those things, which, though they be divine truths and of considerable importance, are, on account of the obscurity attending them, or the minds of men in their investigation, matters of doubtful disputation among good men, and honest enquirers after truth. I speak only of such things as a Church has unanimously agreed about, and which she has judged to be of such importance, either in themselves, or on account of the relation they bear to other things, as to give them a place in the original contract among her members.

PROPOSITION III. Various circumstances may concur to render communion in the participation of the same ordinances, among the members of different Churches, altogether INEXPEDIENT.

When the circumstances of Church members in one or both Churches are such, that communion in the same ordinances would be attended with worse consequences than could be counterbalanced by all the advantages resulting from it;— then I think prudence seems to forbid that species of communion.

Communion in the same ordinances among members of different Societies, of which one is supposed to be bearing Testimony against corruptions in the other, may be attended with essential injury to the best interests of the members in both.

1. The Church which is supposed to be bearing Testimony against the deviations of the other would suffer essentially in her best interests. Her consistency would be rendered disputable, if not totally destroyed. Her banners are inscribed with a dissent from, and a solemn Testimony against the backslidings of her sister Church; yet her practice would naturally imply that she is of one mind and of one heart with her sister, notwithstanding all her deviations from the paths of truth and duty. Her own members would be thereby effectually untaught all their former boasted attachment to the truths of Christianity and the purity of its institutions. And their children, who are the seed of the Church, by the example of their fathers, and from their early and daily hearing the jarring sentiments of the friends and enemies of truth, would be drowned in scepticism and doubt.

2. The Church in which deviations have obtained, beholding her sister, who had displayed the banner of a Testimony against them, trifling with divine truth, in a boundless field of inconsistencies, and flattering her in her courses of backsliding, by holding communion with her members in the most solemn and awful institutions, would be confirmed in her errors, hardened in her maladministrations, and emboldened in her departures from the purity of divine ordinances.

3. Both Churches would be essentially losers. Communion in ordinances is doubtless *ordinarily* incumbent on the members of one particular Church; but it is only *occasionally* incumbent on the members of different Churches, even when they agree in their creeds and rituals. On the other hand, there are, as we have seen, *other* acts of communion, which are ordinarily and *indispensibly* binding on sister Churches to one another mutually, while *that act* of communion in the same ordinances, is binding only *occasionally* on their members, even when it lies in due subordination to their *other* acts of communion as sister Churches. Now, it is a rule in morals, that *occasional* duties must always give place to those which are *ordinary* and *indispensible*. It therefore follows, that when the *occasional* duty of communion in the same ordinances among the members

bers of different, especially *differing* Churches obstructs the success of those other acts of *ordinary* and *indispensible* communion among them, as in case of the deviation of any of them from the truth, the occasional duty ceases to be a duty, in these circumstances, and becomes at least *INEXPEDIENT*, and in some cases, exceedingly *CRIMINAL*, till the offending Society return to her original Principles, and her first love.

Nor are Churches, in these circumstances chargeable with *donatism*, or with any thing analogous to that ancient error. No; these scismatics acknowledged no other Churches, as Churches of Christ, besides those of their own faction in Africa. Their sect, in their overheated imaginations, was the Catholic Church, out of which they affirmed, with all the fury of enthusiasm, there was no salvation. They thought they did God acceptable service, when they committed the greatest cruelties against their fellow Christians. In one word, they declared war against, and broke off communion, in all acts of benevolence and beneficence, as well as of esteem with all the Churches of Christ upon earth. They profaned the staff of beauty; they brake the staff of bands; and they became determined separatists from every species of connection with any Church which refused to join the furious mob, and pronounce their Shibboleth.

But in the present argument, the case supposed is altogether different. No Church, that of Rome excepted, now pretends to be Catholic and the only true Church. The Church of the Secession aspires no higher than to be considered as a very small part of the Universal Church. She is only emulous of being found faithful to God, and to sister Societies of the Catholic body, extended over the habitable world. She is willing to maintain, by every allowed mean, a reciprocation and interchange of all the fruits of the most cordial benevolence toward her sister Churches. She rejoices with them who rejoice, and weeps with them that weep. She sympathizes with the persecuted; she highly esteems those who are found in the faith: and bears a proper Testimony against all who depart from the common standard of doctrine and manners. And
whenever

whenever deviations from her own purity shall be proved against her, she will ever reckon herself happy to receive the reproofs of her sister Churches, and humbly acknowledge her obligations to them for so great a favour.

Thus, my Dear Brother, I have given you my thoughts on the subject of your difficulties. I heartily pray, that they may be helpful to you, in any degree, to dispel those clouds, in which you seem to be enveloped. In the mean time, I earnestly desire that you may take no hasty steps. I am afraid that you and I, being shut up in corners, and not having access to acquire a thorough knowledge of some denominations which bid fair to become popular and perhaps useful, are ready to be dazzled with their perfections, real or imaginary, without being able to lay their imperfections in the balance against them. On the other hand, the beauties of the Secession Church are familiarized to us, and cease to excite our wonder, while her deformities strike us more forcibly in proportion as our admiration of her excellencies is lessened. It is often the case that men treat favourite societies as they do favourite friends; they are most admired when they are least known, and the last are always the best. But I hope better things of my Dear Brother! However, we must not delude ourselves with visionary notions of perfection about any man or society of men. There are few men, and fewer societies, as there are few books, which we shall find ourselves disposed to admire the longer we study them. If some societies have several excellencies which prove that they are made up of good men; all societies have a large proportion of imperfections, which shew that they are not made up of beings above the rank of fallen men. There are not many societies which can stand the test of even a near inspection, much less of a critics eye, jaundiced with prejudice. Their commendable things shine upon us at a distance, but a nearer approach dissolves the pleasant enchantment. The distant ground, which is adorned with a variety of flowers, seems to be *all* in flower; but when we advance to the spot where nature seemed to sport herself

herself in all the profusion of beauty, we find many weeds,
poisonous and ugly, interspersed amidst the once enrapturing
assemblage of colours.

T H E E N D.



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